A few years back, December of 2013 to be specific, John and I found ourselves facing some daunting and unwelcomed news. He needed rotator cuff surgery. In order to be recovered enough to go back to working as a longshoreman in the spring, he needed to have it right away. But … he wasn’t so sure that was what he wanted to do. We were on the tail end of a 6-week road trip.

However, when we realized we would have both time an opportunity to have it done in early January when I was diagnosed with breast cancer and we had to go back to Washington no matter what. His and her surgeries. It was a lot. Those of you that have been down the medical road know, everyone comes at you with varying levels of understanding, myriad questions and lots of advice. I am not one that likes to be hounded with questions. I am however, a pretty open book. So to nip that in the bud, I sat down to start an email for with friends and family about what was happening. With so much unknown as we were beginning this adventure, I was overwhelmed and honestly, kind of scared. It didn’t take long though, before I settled on opening my note with the things I did know. I knew we had doctor appointments. I knew Mom would gladly host us. And I knew I had little to no control over what was on the horizon. The Good News though, the very Good News – as we often refer to the message of the Gospel – is that I knew God did have control. I soon found myself falling back on to, or rather, stepping into, The Apostles’ Creed. I will read it aloud now. It is printed on the inside of the red hymnal, if you would like to follow along.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven,
and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost,
the holy catholic Church\*,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

One may ask, how can I say that **I know this**, not just believe it. **I know it** because my of religion. My religion, Christianity, has taught me how and why having a relationship with the Creator is part of my calling, my destiny and my purpose for my purpose in life.

**Religion, is by definition, a** personal set or institutionalized system of **religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices**; the service and worship of God or the supernatural; commitment or devotion to religious faith or observance; a cause, principle, or system of beliefs **held to** with ardor and faith; **scrupulous conformity** **:**[CONSCIENTIOUSNESS](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conscientiousness)

tHAT IS mERRIAM WEBSTERS DEFINITION AT LEAST. AND IT SEEMS TO JIVE WITH MY understanding OF It.

Spending the last couple of months helping with youth night and considering how best to approach talking to our teens about relationships and the basic fundamentals of religion, specifically Christianity, has given me a lot to think about. It was difficult to know where to start. What do kids these days know about Jesus or salvation? What is Easter to them beyond a bunny and chocolate eggs? I have found many of parents of today having issues with **organized religion**. And why wouldn’t they. Organized religion has certainly let us down over the course of history. Whether it be the burning witches at the stake, questioning who has the right to marry, hiding the abuse of children, or being told your traditional ways of worshipping the almighty is wrong – actions made under the auspices of the church have disappointed, angered, and downright broken the hearts of large groups of our global population over the centuries. Not to mention the big money being made selling salvation by mega churches. It is no wonder that being opposed to organized religion seems to be the new religion of today.

On the heels of Easter and our conclusion, for the time being, of youth night and Sunday school, I feel compelled to talk about how we as a church are approaching our **religion**. Are we seeing a black and white world where it is obvious who should be burned at the stake? Do our beliefs create barriers to loving our neighbor, not as ourselves – but rather as Jesus would love them? In our mission statement we proclaim

As Children of God we embrace our call to share the Good News of the Gospel through worship, fellowship, and open doors providing a nurturing environment as we grow in Christ and minister to our greater community.

Ryan took a dive into our core values over the last five weeks, exploring:

* **Gathering as Broken Sinners, Growing as Redeemed Disciples**
* Life Changing Interactions
* Open Doors (working in and for the community)
* Prayer, of all sorts
* Fostering an embracing and Intergenerational environment

With that under our belts we should be ready and able to walk out those doors and proclaim the Good News of the Gospel – those four books of the bible that tells us all the miracles and mysteries of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection.

But do we? If you are like me, not so often. And only if I am asked. I don’t want to sound like a know it all. For starters, I don’t know enough to be a know it all. And don’t want to sound like I am imposing my beliefs on others. So I am reluctant to talk religion even to those closest to me.

I’ve never known of a time that religion wasn’t a part of my life. While that may be true for much my generation and those that preceded me, **the tradition is losing its steam**.

**And for a variety of reasons**, some very valid. My Dad, born, raised and a practicing Catholic for most of his life, quit attending church because of the mishandling and coverup of the abuse cases. My sister, attended catechism until she took her first communion, sometime in elementary school. And that was about it. Mom didn’t want anything to do with church once she was done with the parochial school that ostracized and treated her so poorly,

as the only child of a divorce in the church. But, both grandmothers attended Sunday services faithfully every Sunday. I think the disconnect within my family was part of what kept my interest alive. I was baptized, took confession and first communion from the Catholic Church. I took a class and skipped school for Ash Wednesday Service when I was a high school senior. In college a bible literature class spurred a lot of questions. College roommate and to this day, one my best friends, has remained a bright light of encouragement, as she continues to be very active and teaches her Catholic beliefs each and every day of her life.

I attended St Therese a couple times that first summer I was in town. But didn’t feel any connection. Once I began working at AP&T, Alan and Sheryl encouraged me to come to First Pres. Which I did intermittently. John, born and raised Lutheran, attended Frist Pres when he worshipped, but it was sporadic at best. From the first though, it felt comfortable. My childhood teachings made it so I could recite the Prayer and the creed and understand the rituals. However, it wasn’t until I heard Karen Parson’s preach, **that I felt compelled**. For the first time in my life, I realized the person in the pulpit was not an authority over me. She was human, just like me. Hearing the teaching of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection preached by an ordinary human **awoke my heart**. Until that point, my thought was the person in the pulpit was better than me, judging me, an authority over all I should and shouldn’t do. I was somehow ashamed of not living up to their expectations. The ember that had been burning was finally ignited.

Add to the story the part where John and I married in an Anglican church, naturally we now fill roles as deacons and elders in the Presbyterian faith. A pair of religious mutts I’ve always said. And I don’t think our background is all that different than many who attend here. In fact, Ryan may be the only born and bred Presbyterian of the bunch. The reason it works though, for the most part at least, is that we all agree on a few things. And lucky enough for us, somewhere mid second century these truths were compiled as a part of teaching, a catechizes. These beliefs known to us today as The Apostles’ Creed, form a foundation of common belief among **Christians**. We here at First Pres recite the Creed in unison for baptisms, and ordinations. Some churches say it every week. It sums up **in a tidy little package** what we, as Christians believe in – what we agree on. From that common understanding, we have split and schismed into so many different **denominations** it feels like a new one pops up every day. That is a result of agreeing and disagreeing **as to how we live out these beliefs** and what role the bible plays in … Gotta love free will.

So when I contemplate how we got from Jesus’ commandment at the last supper to –

“Love one another. **As I have loved you**, so must you love one another,” to where we are today, all too often I just shake my head. I don’t know. But I **can** talk about where we can go from here, **knowing what we do know**.

What does that look like? It’s 2022. Let’s look to Wikipedia for starters. It tells us that there are over **4,200 recognized religions in the world**. And it may or may not surprise you to hear that there are over that within the Christian religion, there are over 40,000 different denominations. So, when we try to answer the question, **what do we believe** and how do we talk about it with non-believers, **there are a lot of different answers**. I have good news. The Apostles’ Creed is largely accepted as a common foundation of Christianity. It is something most religious folks agree on and that history supports. Most, not all. The Eastern Orthodox church does not affirm it but only because of what it lacks, not what it claims.

The Creed made national news a couple years back. You may or may not recall images or reports from George Bush Sr’s funeral services. All the presidents and their wives stood in a row. When the Creed was recited in unison, President Trump and Melania did not participate. So that made news. But it wasn’t because they believed differently or denounced it. The church they belong to, Churches of Christ, does not see a need for creeds – The church’s teachings however, would affirm the beliefs contained within it.

The Apostles’ Creed gives us a starting place, as we go out into the world, living out Jesus’ final commandment, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded of you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Our faith has never been intended to be kept private. **Christ wants us to share it**. So let’s do that. And if you aren’t sure how, the Apostles’ Creed is a great place to start.

**I believe in God. The Father Almighty. Maker of Heaven and Earth.**

 We begin by aligning ourselves with more than just “something greater.” We are acknowledging **the God of the creed**. His Christen name, according to Karl Barth is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Ours is a triune God, three in one, not one in three. The trinity aspect of God is often referred to as one of the great mysteries and I am ill equipped to take a deep dive into trinitarianism. Exodus 3:14 gives us God telling Moses, I am who I am. He goes on saying, “the Lord, the God of your Fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob – has sent me to you. This is my name forever, the by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.” It is here that we are introduced to our adopted family. Packer tells us this “has to do with the believing sinner’s adoption into the life of god’s family. This is a super-natural gift of grace, linked with justification and new birth, freely given by God and received humbly **by faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord**. Almighty refers to God’s power to fulfill his purposes not being limited by anything that he made.”

 The opening words to the bible, Genesis 1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Heavens and the earth is kind of short for **everything known to us.** You see it? God created it. Here the Bible introduces us to the creator, the author, the artist, the engineer. focusing on **who he is** and **what he is doing**, rather than how. And … he made us in his image. Genesis 1:27, God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

 This can be where we start. How we start. Who is God to you? It opens the door to a lot of questions, but it is a jumping off point. What about the bible? Why do you believe in that? Wasn’t it written by man and therefore biased? All reasonable questions. Good questions for discussion. Answers to which not everyone agrees. But for those of us here, that want to take that step and go out and proclaim what you believe –

maybe not from a soapbox in the town square,

but perhaps over coffee or on a walk with a friend, it’s a place to start. And we need to start. We have been commanded to start. But it’s kind of scary. Kind of like hearing a cancer diagnosis. But, whether it is cancer or talking to our kids about Jesus, God will continue to equip us and walk alongside us as we proclaim His truth.

I am not sure what to tell an adult who was told as a child that her parents would burn in hell because they were divorced. I struggle with the answers when my girlfriend, in love with another woman, asks what I think about marriage. Words escape me when I talk to a neighbor with an addiction or the couple down the street that are cheating on each other. My gut tells me though … and my heart echoes, tell them to first **get to know God**. Not the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians – but God, eh Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth. And if it is with us here at First Pres, great.

The only answer I have is to **get to know God**. Introduce yourself to Him. Seeks ways to develop a relationship with him, learn about him, study him, and **He will find you**. He will meet you right where you are. **When I am able to share this message**, … when **you are able to share this message**, have this conversation, **we fulfill Christ’s last commandment**. When you aren’t sure what to say or how to respond as you broach the subject, hear the words of Matthew, “Ask and you will find. Seek and the door will be open.” He won’t leave you hanging, for too long, at least.